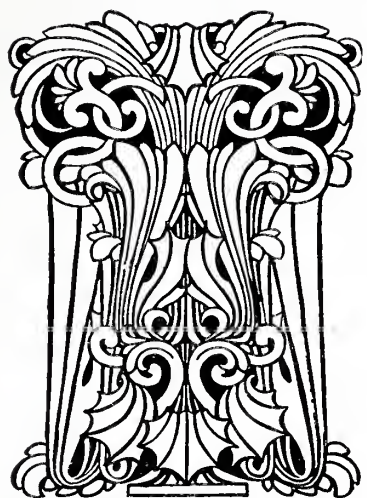




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G. F. WATTS



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Photo F. Hoyer

The Rider of the White Horse.

From the painting by G. F. Watts R.A.

G·F·WATTS·



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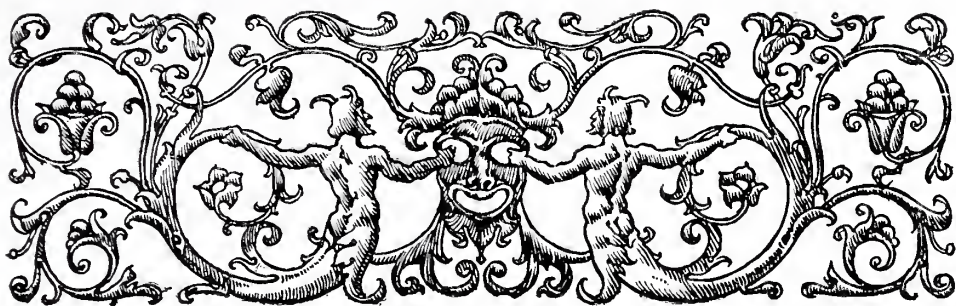
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A BIOGRAPHY

BY W. K. WEST.

IT must be admitted, at the outset, that the material available for a biographical study of George Frederick Watts is comparatively limited. A life so much occupied as his was with the consistent working out of a specific artistic purpose, and so dominated by a particular idea, must necessarily appear to be somewhat barren of incident. The studious recluse who employs none of the accepted devices for attracting the attention of the public, or for securing popular favour, who cares nothing for advertisement, and asks only to be left alone to carry out a self-imposed mission, does not have an adventurous existence. His record becomes simply one of constant labour directed solely to the satisfaction of his desire to do what he believes to be right. He sets up his own standard of accomplishment, and the effort to reach it provides the engrossing pursuit of his life. To come out of his seclusion and to take any part in the activities of the community in which he happens to be placed would seem to him to be but a waste of time which could be better employed. It is possible, of course, that he may live and die unknown to anyone but his small circle of personal friends, and that the greatness of his services to humanity may not be recognised until, long after his death, his achievement comes to be summed up; but he takes this risk sooner than run into what he holds to be the greater danger of dissipating his energies in striving for immediate recognition.

Fortunately the work to which Watts gave himself, in response to the promptings of his temperament, was of such a nature that its

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results could be at once appreciated. Unlike many other scholars, he dealt with visible things, and was able to put his thoughts into a form which allowed them to make a direct and significant appeal to all thinking men. Therefore, despite his refusal to concern himself with the politics of his profession, or to interest himself in the rivalries of schools and creeds, despite his avoidance of social advertisement and of the schemes of the hunter for popularity, he was able to make his influence felt in the art world and to command some measure of the attention that was his due. Through his long career he was multiplying so steadily the evidences of his sincerity and of his devotion to high ideals, and these evidences were so commanding in their power, that he became, as years went on, an admitted leader in art without ever having to submit to those sacrifices by which, as a general rule, leadership has to be bought.

But if, in consequence of his intentional isolation, the material he provides for a biography is wanting in the variety which so often makes amusing an account of the doings of other great artists, it is unquestionably ample enough within its definite bounds. Not many painters have left a record so crowded with a particular type of activity or so rich in consistent achievement. Not many, perhaps, have been so ready to stake the whole of their reputation upon the chance of inducing the art lover to accept a kind of art which is, by its very seriousness and didactiveness, unlikely to be widely popular. But then it must be remembered that Watts was essentially a man who regarded with indifference the possibility of using his profession as a means of securing personal honours and rewards. It may be that there was an element of fanaticism in his strenuous sincerity, and that he carried to extremes his avoidance of all those conventional badges of distinction which are accepted commonly as a sort of hall-mark of success; but at least his attitude was logical and natural enough in a man of his unusual personality. It was sufficient reward for him to feel that his quiet and prolonged labours for the cause in which he had such absolute belief had not been ineffectual, that his life had not been wasted, and that in seeking to satisfy himself he had also convinced some at least of the people who were capable of realising the nature of his aims. Viewed in this light, his career is dramatic enough to provide a life-story of surpassing interest, because from beginning to end it is a revelation of the working of a rare and striking individuality.

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It is not improbable that the character of his artistic enthusiasm, with its intense idealism and nobility of intention, is due in great measure to the fact that he was of Celtic descent—of Welsh ancestry. From such a strain he derived no doubt what would appear to material minds to have been his dreamy impracticability, his preference for the pursuit of ideals rather than the solid and tangible rewards which most people consider to be the only things worth acquiring. From it came also his imagination and his poetic inclination, his sympathy with the struggles of humanity, and his profound interest in the inexplicable problems of human life. Even in the manner of his art there was something of the Celtic impressionability and readiness to respond to suggestion. That he had, besides, a steadfastness of purpose which is not commonly an attribute of the Celt is not to be denied; this tenacity was a most valuable addition to his other qualities, for it enabled him to develop to the utmost all that was best in his intellectual equipment, and to progress without hesitation towards the goal which he desired to reach.

He was born—on February 23rd, 1817—in London, whither his father had migrated from Hereford some years previously. From this parent, an inventor and scientist, he inherited, it would seem, his constructive ability and his power to put into coherent shape the fancies which filled his mind—an inheritance which is, by the way, far from uncommon, for many other instances could be quoted of artists who have come of a practical and scientific stock. Evidences of his artistic inclination were provided in his earliest years; he began to draw while he was still little more than a baby, and during his boyhood he was constantly striving to express himself pictorially. When he was not more than twelve or thirteen he had advanced sufficiently in knowledge of his craft to attempt, with some degree of success, comparatively ambitious compositions. Even then, it is interesting to note, he had a pronounced preference for romantic and imaginative motives, and chose material which gave him scope for the exercise of his inventive powers. His inclination towards romanticism was proved by his selection at this period of a number of subjects from the poems and novels of Sir Walter Scott, and his love of things heroic and impressive by his illustrations of stirring scenes from Homer. Already he had a grasp of the dramatic side of painting, a correct perception of the manner in which colour should be managed, and a definite purpose in his artistic

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effort. There does not seem to have been in his case that tentative stage when the youthful mind wavers between different kinds of expression and inclines to imitation now of one master and now of another; on the contrary, his development was steadily along the lines which led to the freest assertion of his independent judgment.

How definitely he had, even in his youth, made up his mind as to what he wanted to do is shown by the manner of his training. He entered the schools of the Royal Academy, but only to leave them after a few weeks' experience of the sort of education which they offered. Apparently he decided then that the art school would not give him what he desired, for he went to no other regular teaching place, but settled down instead to a course of self-preparation in which he managed his education in the way that seemed to him to be best suited to his needs. His principal objects of study were the Elgin marbles, those masterpieces of the Greek sculptors, which inspired him, as they have others among the greater painters of the English school, with a noble sense of style, and confirmed him in his resolve to aim only at the most dignified form of design. How much they impressed him, and how strongly they affected the whole course of his achievement in after years, no one who has even superficially studied his painting can fail to perceive; they provided the firm foundation upon which he built up the entire system of his art; and though, as his experience widened, he modified his purely sculpturesque manner by embroidering it with more pictorial graces, he never lost the classic quality which he acquired as a direct result of his early self-education.

That he had a very strong love of sculpture in his student days is further proved by his habit of haunting the studio of Behnes, the sculptor, who was at that time a man of much repute. He had no actual instruction from Behnes, and can certainly not be counted as in any sense his pupil; but he seems to have constantly watched this artist when at work and to have occasionally made drawings of the casts which were to be found in the studio. No doubt the elder man sympathised with the enthusiasm of a lad who was evidently so much in earnest in his search for knowledge, and in consequence may have helped him with advice and criticism, but at best such teaching must have been of the most desultory and casual kind. Watts himself has said of this connection with Behnes, "I never studied under him in the ordinary acceptation of the term," so that clearly these visits to the

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sculptor's studio were without any systematic educational intention, and could have had but little effect upon the general course of the boy's training. The point is worth explanation, because it has been more than once claimed that Mr. Watts was an actual pupil of Behnes, and was really prepared by him for his profession.

The lack of systematic training, or rather of teaching, in an art school, or under a regular master, certainly had not the effect of delaying the young artist's progress. There is in existence a portrait which he painted of himself, at the age of eighteen, that reveals a remarkable amount of technical knowledge and observation of character, and that would have been a quite creditable performance for a man of matured powers; but even if this illustration of his skill had not been available, the fact that he was able to contribute, when he was only twenty, a couple of portraits and a picture to the exhibition of the Royal Academy, would go far to establish the efficiency of his equipment. This first appearance, in 1837, as an exhibitor was effective as a sign that he had passed beyond the merely preparatory stage of his career, and that his position among the producers of works of art had become definite enough to deserve encouragement. The picture which he showed on this occasion was *The Wounded Heron*, a comparatively unambitious effort, but one which did him credit as a craftsman.

In 1840 he had at the Academy a portrait of *J. Whichelo, Esq.*, and a picture of a subject from Boccaccio, *Isabella finding Lorenzo Dead*, and to the same year belongs another picture, *The Fount*. During the next two years he painted portraits of *Miss Brunton*, *Madame Jonieles*, *Lady Catherine*, *Lady Victoria*, and *the Hon. Roden Noel*, and *Mrs. Constantine Ionides*, the first of which appeared at the Academy in 1841, and the second in 1842; and in addition he completed several pictures. The chief of these were his *Vertumnus and Pomona*, *Aurora*, and a Shakespearean subject, *Guiderius*, *Arviragus*, and *Belarius*, which was one of his contributions to the 1842 Academy. The *Aurora* was a commission from Mr. Ionides, the patron for whom many of his earlier pictures and portraits were produced, and the members of whose family he has painted in successive generations almost without exception. This picture has a particular interest, because it was the first of that great series of poetic conceptions in which he manifested, as years went on, the astonishing richness of his fancy and the fertility of his imagination. It marked definitely the commence-

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ment of his transition from what may be called illustrative romanticism to pure fantasy, in which he was able to exercise to the utmost his intellectual powers.

The first competition, in 1842, for the decoration of the Houses of Parliament, gave him an opportunity, of which, as can well be imagined, he was not slow to take advantage. When, in July, 1843, the hundred and forty cartoons, which had been sent in by various artists in response to the invitation of the Royal Commission, were exhibited, it was found that one of the first prizes, a sum of £300, had been awarded to Watts for a composition representing *Caractacus led in Triumph through the Streets of Rome*. This cartoon is unfortunately no longer in existence. It was sold by the Decoration Commissioners for a small sum, and the purchaser, a picture dealer, cut out of it the parts he considered to be of marketable value, and presumably destroyed the rest. Such an episode is little to the credit of the officials concerned; as the design was never carried out, at least the cartoon should have been preserved in justice to the artist. However, it is clear that Government departments were as incapable of understanding artistic questions in the forties as they are at the present day.

But although this competition had seemingly done nothing to permanently advance the young painter's reputation, it had indirectly a very definite influence on his development. He had for some time desired to make that visit to Italy to which all the art workers at that period looked forward as the crowning fact in their education. Italy, with its stores of artistic treasures, was regarded then as the finishing school where alone the highest kind of knowledge could be acquired, and a stay there was considered to be as much a necessity for the painter or sculptor with lofty aspirations as the Grand Tour had been for the man of social standing. When Watts was a youth this tradition had not begun to wane, perhaps fortunately, for he was of all men the one most likely to profit by study of the masterpieces of antiquity and the great achievements of the artists of the Renaissance. He was something of a mediævalist by temperament, and in Italy the æsthetic atmosphere was just what by inclination and habit of mind he was predisposed to feel sympathy with and enjoy.

So with the money that his success in the competition had brought him he betook himself abroad, and after staying for a few weeks in

Paris he proceeded to Florence, where it seemed to him that he would find the fullest material for study. His choice of destination was, as events proved, most fortunate, for Lord Holland, the British Minister there, showed him much kindness, and strove in all possible ways to advance his interests. This happy encouragement caused him to considerably alter his plans. Originally he had intended to make but a short stay in Italy, and to return to England within a few weeks or months at the most. But Lord Holland's patronage enabled him to prolong his residence in Florence for four years, and to become acquainted with a great number of prominent people whose influence could not fail to be most advantageous to him. At the Minister's house he was a member of a social circle to which was admitted practically everyone of distinction who lived in or came to the city, and not unnaturally, as he was held in such high esteem by his host, his services as a portrait painter were in much request.

Meanwhile he was making the most of his opportunities of increasing his technical experience and of improving his understanding of artistic principles by careful examination of the great paintings which were within his reach. Anything more than examination he does not seem to have attempted. He did not set to work to copy pictures, but was content to store his mind with impressions obtained by thoughtful analysis of the achievements of the old masters and by close investigation of the executive processes by which they arrived at their noble results. That this analytical habit was helpful to him is clear from the way in which he gained in breadth and command over his craft during his residence in Italy. He was working for these four years in the most congenial surroundings, among people who sympathised with his enthusiasms and in a place where he could refer to the finest examples of painting whenever he wished to make sure that he was carrying out his own pictures in the correct manner. Such a form of discipline was exactly what he needed to give order and coherence to his ideas, and by his response to it he certainly proved the value of Italy as a finishing school.

While he was abroad the second competition for the Houses of Parliament decoration had taken place without his making any attempt to contribute; but when the third was projected, in 1846, he was advised by Lord Holland to try his fortune once again. In response to this advice he prepared a colossal composition illustrating a scene

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from English history, *King Alfred inciting the Saxons to prevent the Landing of the Danes*, and this cartoon was in due course awarded a first prize of £500, and was purchased by the Government. His design, suitable as it was in subject for a British national building, was not carried out, but instead he was called upon to paint, in the Upper Waiting Hall of the Houses of Parliament, a fresco of *St. George overcoming the Dragon*. On this he was engaged for some while, for, though he began the work in 1848, he did not complete it until 1853. Since then, time and the London atmosphere have wrought havoc with the painting, and it is now but a shadow of what it was originally. Yet it may fairly be assumed that he did not lack expert knowledge of this particular form of technical practice, as he had executed not long before a fresco in the Villa Careggi, Lord Holland's country house in Italy. To this period, covered by his stay in Italy, belong another cartoon, *Echo*, and a picture, *Fata Morgana*, the first version of a subject which he afterwards painted on a more important scale.

On his return to England he began again to exhibit at the Academy, but even then he was disinclined to adopt the generally accepted methods of attracting public attention. He did not paint the recognised type of exhibition picture; he did not even work with any specific idea of sending his productions to this or that gallery. But he was always busy with portraits and imaginative canvases, and a certain number of these found their way to the Academy, often some years after they had been finished. Sufficient, at all events, were shown to prove to his admirers that he was becoming more evidently year by year one of the greatest figures in the British art world. For instance, in 1848 appeared his portraits of *Lady Holland* and *Monsieur Guizot*; in 1849, a portrait of *Miss Virginia Pattle*, a magnificent design for a fresco, "*The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light*," and a second picture, *Life's Illusions*; in 1850, portraits of *The Countess Somers* and *Mrs. Jackson*, a picture *Adeline*, and that composition, *The Good Samaritan*, which he ultimately presented to the City Hall at Manchester as a memorial of Thomas Wright, the philanthropist; and in 1851 and 1852, portraits of *Colonel Rawlinson*, *Mrs. J. Ruskin*, *Lord John Russell*, and *Francis Albert Rollo Russell*.

There was a sufficient reason for his activity as a portrait painter during the earlier years of his working life. He had neither given up nor modified any part of his ambition to fulfil a very exacting mission

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as a teacher of moral lessons, and he was anxious to be in a position to avoid any interference with his freedom of action. But the ordinary needs of existence imposed upon him the obligation to consider to some extent the money earning question. So to make an income sufficient to enable him to deal with his imaginative work exactly as he pleased, and without being forced to modify his intentions for the sake of producing pictures which the general public would understand and buy, he devoted part of his time to portraiture, and in this branch of practice achieved the greatest success. Yet even in portrait painting he was prepared to do much simply to please himself. He wished to make a collection of representations of the most famous of his contemporaries, with the intention of transferring it eventually to the nation. He formed this idea early in his life, and as years went on he increased his efforts to carry it out efficiently, so that at last he succeeded in realising his purpose with something like completeness. But neither this evidence of his public spirit, nor the splendid manifestation which he has given us of his imaginative and didactic faculties would have been possible if he had not in his youth and early middle life been reasonably ready to accept commissions from the many sitters who were anxious to be painted by him.

However, he never yielded to the temptation, which a man of less strength of character might have found some difficulty in resisting, to grasp simply at the many chances of money making which were open to him in this direction. His time was very carefully divided between the things which brought him in an income and those which expressed his lofty aim as an artist. He was always ready to attempt great undertakings, most of which afforded not even a remote prospect of remuneration, and he was constantly busy with memorable pictures, which, even if he had been willing to dispose of them, he knew were very unlikely to be sought after by the generality of the collectors who were buying the sort of work that was fashionable in the middle of the nineteenth century. One of his characteristic ambitions was to revive in this country the greatest type of mural decoration, and with this intention he volunteered to paint at his own expense a fresco to fill the north wall of the New Hall of Lincoln's Inn. This magnificent work, perhaps the greatest he ever accomplished, had for its subject *The School of Legislature*, or rather, to give it the title he preferred, *Justice: a Hemicycle of Law-givers*. There are in the composition

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thirty-three figures, and the painting is forty feet high and forty-five feet long, so that it made extraordinary demands upon his energies. It was some years in progress, but was finished by the end of 1859. To their credit the Benchers of Lincoln's Inn showed a real appreciation of the artist's generosity, and presented him with a gold cup and a purse of £500 as a mark of their approval. Another, and even more important project, which he also proposed to carry out at his own expense—the adornment of the great hall at Euston Station with wall paintings representing *The Progress of Cosmos*—fell through because the directors of the railway, alarmed rather than gratified by his offer, refused to allow him to touch their building. But later on he had other opportunities of showing how capable he was of remarkable achievement in this direction, and, though he never did a tithe of what he intended, he made some notable additions to the small stock of mural decorations in this country. One of his frescoes was painted at Bowood, the Marquis of Lansdowne's Wiltshire seat, and another in the church of St. James the Less, near Vauxhall Bridge. This last fresco, however, has now disappeared; it was replaced some years ago by a reproduction in mosaic.

To the fact that he was engaged in carrying out these special schemes, and to his absence from England in 1857, when he went with the mission under Sir Charles Newton to the site of Halicarnassus, and travelled in various parts of Asia Minor, is probably due his comparative abstention from exhibiting. But from 1859—when he painted his portrait of Tennyson, and showed at the Academy a picture, *Isabella*—onwards to his death in 1904 he was represented in the public galleries year by year, almost without a break. In 1864 he sent to the Academy his *Time and Oblivion*, and to this same year belongs his colossal canvas, *Mid-day Rest*. The Academy had also the portraits of *Dean Stanley* and *Professor Joachim* in 1867; *Sir F. Leighton, R.A.*, and *J. E. Millais, R.A.*, in 1871; *P. H. Calderon, R.A.*, and the picture, *Cain*, in 1872; *The Duke of Cleveland* in 1873; *John Stuart Mill* in 1874; *The Spirit of Christianity* in 1875; and *By the Sea* and a portrait of *C. Macnamara, Surgeon to the Westminster Hospital*, in 1876. Mr. Watts had been elected, in 1867, an Associate, and immediately afterwards a full member of the Academy, not only without any solicitation on his part, but actually without his knowledge that there was any intention of proposing him. At first he is said to have intended to

refuse the honour, as he afterwards refused on more than one occasion offers of a knighthood or a baronetcy, but the persuasions of his friends prevailed and he remained an Academician till his retirement in 1896, when he was within a few months of eighty. He painted the *Cain* as his diploma work.

The opening of the Grosvenor Gallery gave him a place where he could show his pictures under more favourable conditions than existed at Burlington House, and so he sent there in 1877 his *Love and Death*, and the portraits of *Edward Burne-Jones*, *The Hon. Mrs. Percy Wyndham*, and *Lady Lindsay*, and to the Academy, among other canvases, *Miss Dorothy Tennant*. During the next few years he exhibited more than he ever had before, and drew largely upon the store of memorable canvases which he had been assiduously accumulating. To the Academy went, in 1878, *Britomart* and the portraits of *J. Blumenthal*, *W. E. Lecky*, and *Lady Constance Lawley*; in 1879, *Earl Cadogan*, *Sir W. Armstrong*, and *Colonel Lindsay*; in 1880, *Mrs. Frederic Myers*, *The Bishop of Exeter*, *The Dean's Daughter*, and the portrait of himself for the Uffizzi Gallery; in 1881, *Matthew Arnold*, *C. A. Ionides*, and *Sir F. Leighton*, a second portrait of the famous artist; and in 1882, *The Prince of Wales*. Among the canvases which appeared at the Grosvenor Gallery were *Sir Galahad* (1878); *Enid and Geraint*, *Orpheus and Eurydice*, *Paolo and Francesca*, and *W. E. Gladstone*, all in 1879; *Daphne and Psyche* in 1880; *Endymion*, *The Genius of Greek Poetry*, and *The Wife of Pygmalion* in 1881; *Cardinal Manning* and *W. L. Motley* in 1882; *Death on the Pale Horse* in 1883; *Lord Lytton* in 1884; and in 1885 his exquisite *Love and Life* and *Mount Ararat*.

These ample contributions to the regular exhibitions did not, however, constitute the only assertion of his claims to attention which was made at this time. He had by now obtained a position in the estimation of the public which made it impossible for him to resist the general desire that his works should be seen in something like a connected series. So at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1882, at New York in 1885, and at Birmingham in the same year, comprehensive shows were organised, which revealed in a most convincing way the strength and the variety of his effort. Any lingering doubt that a few people may have felt about his right to be ranked among the chief of the masters whom this country has produced was effectually dispelled by these wonderful displays. They decided once for all the reality of his greatness,

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and by the evidence they provided of his loftiness of purpose and his consistent pursuit of life-long ideals they justified to the utmost his unhesitating belief in the correctness of the aim which had guided him through some half century of strenuous endeavour. Few artists could have borne so admirably such a severe test, and fewer still could have entered upon it with such absolute confidence in the result. He, at all events, had no cause to fear that his motives could be misconstrued; no taint of self-interest had ever entered into his practice, and what he had set himself to do he had done to the very best of his great ability.

To go into the details of the last twenty years of his life is hardly necessary. Amply as he had earned the right to rest, he showed no desire to relax his effort with increasing age, but continued to labour on with all his old faith in the cause which he had so long upheld, and with an amount of energy that was marvellous in a man who had never had very robust health. Moreover, he showed no sign of failure either in eye or hand; his technical skill remained to the last absolutely unimpaired, his draughtsmanship was as sure, his colour as harmonious, and his characterisation as acute as they had ever been in earlier life, and his imagination lost none of its freshness and breadth of sympathy. The pictures of this final period, the *Jonah*, the superb portrait of *Walter Crane*, and the delightful fantasy, *A Fugue*, which was seen at the New Gallery only a few months ago, and many others not less memorable, afford the fullest proof that there never came to him that time of decadence which has brought the careers of so many art workers to an inglorious end. On the contrary, the labours of Watts were fittingly rounded off by the appearance of one of the most commanding of all his works, the colossal statue of *Physical Energy*, which amazed every visitor to Burlington House in the spring of 1904. What was the secret of his vitality it is hard to say, but if, as it well may be, decadence is the penalty which the artist has to pay for assuming that the attainment of popularity takes away the necessity for continuance of effort, it is possible that he owed the astonishing preservation of his powers to his unceasing desire for self-improvement. He had certainly no delusions about popular approval; and though he gained it in the amplest measure, it never blinded his judgment and never made him less strenuous in his resolve to do what he conceived to be his duty to art.

THE ART OF GEORGE FREDERICK WATTS

BY ROMUALDO PÁNTINI.



WATTS'S artistic works are so numerous that a whole book would be needed to examine them thoroughly. But our object is principally to consider that part which we have ourselves seen. And what we have seen in Museums, in the two studios, and in Exhibitions is quite considerable enough to allow us to generalise upon it. But in order to facilitate our analysis, and to give the reader a distinct impression, we must distinguish in the Master four different aspects: the painter of Symbols and myths, the portraitist, the landscape painter, and the sculptor; the four sides, perhaps not all equal, of a tower which forms one distinct organic whole.

It has been said that Watts is the kind of artist who can be looked for and found in England alone. The assertion is not perhaps of such absolute value as it appears to be at first sight; but it is certain that the high disinterestedness which guided him in his work is a glorious example in the artistic history of our age. His early triumphs and the immediate and permanent recognition which he received assured him a very comfortable position, from which he might easily have risen to higher honours and have amassed great wealth. But Watts sought nothing beyond a life of peace and security; simple and modest in his greatness he did not allow himself to be led away by the salons and cliques of the artistic world, and yielded to the frivolities of society no more than would preserve him from the charge of *sauvagerie*. Thus he was able to accumulate an immense number of works, never seeking to sell them, but keeping them by him to present them at last to the country. The motto of his whole life can be truly expressed in those two sacred words adopted as their motto by many who cannot honestly and conscientiously claim them, "For Art and Country." But Watts, whose conscience on this point was clear and calm, saw his artistic dream accepted and applauded in his own lifetime. The great hall which bears his name in the National Gallery of British Art is wholly adorned with his pictures and one piece of his sculpture; the splendid gift, recently completed by *The Court of Death*, was received in 1897 with the honour due to an artist of so genial a type, who for colour, for creative

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and suggestive power, and for breadth of feeling, was certainly the most complete painter whom England can boast since Turner.

Let us take two of his best known works: *Love and Life* and *Love and Death*. The former as seen in this collection is a replica of those in the Luxembourg and at Washington; it is perhaps the work which has contributed more than any other to the painter's world-wide reputation. The group is solid, dignified, and harmonious; the warm, rosy atmosphere thrills with a sentiment of poetry and encouragement. Life, as a woman in her first youth, approaches Love, who welcomes her with strong bronzed hands and protects her with his mighty wings. The ascent is steep and rugged; they have not yet reached the top, but Love is strong enough to guide and sustain her. Love, who can illuminate and sustain Life when she tenderly appeals for his help, can also contend with Death. For in the other picture, once more the Child-Love of fable, he energetically opposes the majestic figure of Death, who tries to cross the threshold in front of which still hang branches of smiling roses. The picture does not tell us with whom victory will rest. Death hides her face; she impresses us only by means of the ample folds of her peplum and the mysterious gesture of her uplifted hand. The mantle is white, and clothes with dignity, not the usual wooden lay-figure, but the solidly-modelled form of a Queen of Peace. So she will overcome the last efforts of Love; she is the mother who cures the last ills of Life.

The painter has seized two essential moments of the human parable, and has seized and rendered them with all the breadth and all the imagination of his ardent brush; there are none of those conventions, those miserable conventions, which are necessary to the builders of formulas; or at least, there are only those which are inseparable from general culture. The dramatic force of the two pictures consists really in the pictorial completeness of the forms, in the life which they gain from the colours, or, rather, the masses of colour, contrasted and yet admirably blended like some joyful strain of music.

Thus much of the two compositions as they speak to the eye. As to the occasion from which *Love and Death* sprang, we may remember that the idea was suggested to the painter by the story of a youth. He was painting the portrait of a young man of position and wealth, who was suffering from phthisis. The most energetic measures, the most loving care, were unable to arrest the disease. And the painter, who was a witness of the unavailing struggle, was seized with a feeling of dismay, and understood that against Fate Love contends in vain. Yet he clung to his optimism. Death may prevail over Love, but it

will never be the bogey that it is believed to be. In a phrase which has become famous and which he liked to repeat (I myself heard it from his lips), he defined it boldly as "the gentle nurse that puts the children to bed." Now there hangs in the great hall opposite *Love and Death* his greatest conception, *The Court of Death*. Death, "the good nurse," sits in the form of a great winged angel on the ruins of the world, and, like a good nurse, dandles a child on her knees. Her head stands out against a golden background, and on either side of her are two spirits ready to lift the curtains of the mysterious world. Subjects of every condition and of every age have answered to her call; the king offers her his crown, the warrior lays down his sword, the student looks no more at his beloved books, and the cripple and the slave drag themselves together to the foot of her painless throne, while a little child hides prettily amongst the folds of the long mantle which flows down from it. The arrangement of all these figures is excellent and as varied as possible, the harmony of colour is admirable, and yet the picture does not take full possession of us. The artist has tried to say many things—too many, perhaps—and, when we have emancipated ourselves from the spell of the colouring, we feel that we need reflection in order to grasp the significance of every part. Perhaps also we feel the need of a greater number of ideas than the painter did. The picture, in fact, is too didactic. Yet we like this maternal idea of death, and it pleases us a good deal more in other smaller works, such as *Death crowning Innocence*, where the half-figure of the angel bending over the child, enclosed as it is by the large wings, seems to be appearing between the valves of some mighty shell.

If we take our eyes from this and fix them upon the verdant symphony of *Hope*, we feel our heart beat once more. The picture does not need a title. The young girl with bandaged eyes gracefully reclining on the world reveals with what intensity she is listening. The lyre which she holds with her left hand has but one string remaining, all the others are broken and floating on the breeze; but the single string vibrates still, and, in the mysterious half-light, to the woman who cannot see the infinite space that sound is the whole of Life.

* * * *

The examination of these pictures has brought us directly to the heart of the question, which may be stated thus:—

Painting may be eloquent; that is, a revealer and enforcer of truth, but within what limits?

The dominant ideas of G. F. Watts are not unknown to us. He has always repeated: "I paint ideas, not things; I paint primarily

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because I have something to say, and since the gift of eloquent language has been denied me, I use painting ; my intention is not so much to paint pictures which shall please the eye, as to suggest great thoughts which shall speak to the imagination and to the heart and arouse all that is best and noblest in humanity." But he feels it right to add : "I teach great truths, but I do not dogmatise ; on the contrary, I purposely admit every form of belief, and I appeal to men of every age and every faith. I accompany them to the church-door and I allow each to enter and to feel God's presence in his own way."

These sentences are more than sufficient to make it clear that Watts was a believing painter as well as a believing man. And his faith was not confined within the blind limits of dogma, but reached and embraced all humanity. Last year, speaking to an English writer, he returned to the point and defined his opinions perhaps more clearly. The Church of Rome seems to him intolerant by nature, and therefore she has lost her power over the human mind. It is true that she embodies a great idea ; and in old days when humanity was divided into beasts of prey and beasts of burden she was of great service to it ; but the painter did not believe, he said, that this ideal central force for controlling morality could be revived, because the human mind will no longer consent to be eternally confined by the restrictions of the Roman creed. And when his interlocutor raised an objection he continued with a parallel at once acute and thoroughly artistic : "Creeds are very useful for their own purpose, but at bottom they are but pictures of the Infinite as seen by the mind of man. I will give you an illustration. I have seen, we will suppose, some representation of a natural object, and I want to make you understand what sort of a thing it is. But to make a drawing, outline, or sketch of it, and to show you that, is much simpler than to describe it in words. So it is with the creed. The Church makes the creed as I make a sketch. For the common man who has never had a vision of his own that is enough. If you can see your object itself you will recognise that my sketch is only an image, not the real thing. The tendency is always to exchange the representation for the reality !" His aim, then, was a very lofty one, we might almost call it extravagant and beyond possibility of realisation, if we place it in conjunction with the motto which pleased him so much : "The utmost for the highest."

These religious ideas, his unshaken faith in progress (although he said paradoxically that civilised nations are not really progressive), and his conscientious integrity, which often led his brush to lash vice

and weakness,—the whole philosophical and moral character, in fact, of his apostolate of Goodness and Beauty must of necessity be familiar to us if we would understand the true meaning of many of his creations.

A Latin, in presence of *The Spirit of Christianity*, can at the first glance only think of it as a simplified variation of an Assumption, Titian's for example. The Virgin, it is true, is not exultant, but looks up with an imploring gesture ; but she is raised above the clouds, she is clad in a red mantle, she is, as it were, supported by a group of angels gathered under her mantle. Yet the great picture is dedicated by the painter to all the Churches, and the woman's gesture and the sadness of her expression are but to implore from above a little comfort for the humble sufferers of humanity ; and the children that she gathers under her mantle are of all races and of all faiths, to show that all must be united since all suffer. And the date of its completion, 1875, explains the meaning of the work. But how does all this concern us ? We seek to read the truth in the lines and colours, and the whole composition speaks more to us, as we have said, of its Titianesque derivation than of the wide meaning that the painter intended to express in it. Just as, in *The Court of Death*, Death sitting in the form of a queen and the attitude of a mother represents for us neither more nor less than a Madonna welcoming and calming all the disappointed ones of Earth. For the truth is, it seems to me, that the spirit of Watts as a painter is intimately connected with the spirit of the best tradition in painting of Italy, and especially of Venice. But this is always religious and Catholic. The English painter takes certain of its forms and gives them new meanings, but the substance is still the same. To be thoroughly convincing, to express eloquently this new order of thoughts and beliefs, it would have been necessary that the kind of forms used should be different and more rugged. It would even have been necessary for the painter to create the form of the new *myth*. But as we now see these pictures, their eloquence is confined to their titles. And I would extend this observation to those other conceptions which bear the titles of *Conscience*, *The Minotaur*, *Mammon*, and the rest. It was not at random that I used the word *myth*. If poetry resembles painting, painting no less resembles poetry. And Socrates said of poetry that it was more the art of creating *myths* than that of inculcating doctrines. So, to return to our case, the art which does not create a myth becomes didactic ; it tries to deliver a message, but fails. Watts always retains, it is true, the charm of colour, but in his religious paintings this charm is, one might say, an external thing. The artist's thought has outrun his heart and his eye, with the result that the picture hangs, as it were, in empty space.

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When the painter laid aside the robe of the philosopher and became once more a painter, he recognised this deficiency of a form which was not adequate to his whole thought. With his invariable modesty and sincerity, qualities which he retained even at the height of his glory and to the end of his life, he used to console himself by saying that if he had not done anything good in painting he had done what was better—his duty. And he wrote to a friend: "If one would render great subjects, one thing is essential, and one only—to make the fullest possible use of one's own powers, without stopping to consider whether the subject is in itself great or small. That which is really great is so far above our reach that any comparison which could be instituted would be nothing more than the recognition of our own unworthiness. To work with all the energy of the heart, but also with all its simplicity, that is our duty; and he who has done that has the right to be satisfied, whatever may be the result of his work. If I have been useful in showing others the way to greater things, I shall be content; for myself I neither expect nor desire that my work should be counted great in itself." Let us pay our homage, then, to the artist's disinterestedness, modesty, and conscientiousness, and let us return to his truly beautiful paintings.

* * * *

"Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be destroyed": this awful cry could not have been more awfully rendered. The hands outstretched like vibrating tentacles, the dilated eyes, the sun-tanned face, the sombre greenish mantle, give to the figure of the prophet Jonah a terrible and striking effectiveness. In particular those hands and those blue eyes seem to follow us with something of real menace; perhaps the painter-preacher felt his whole soul stirred with the prophet's soul. If so, the moment of indignation was a happy one, for the picture is a solid piece of work. From one point of view we may compare with it the figure of the Rich Man, inspired by the words of St. Mark: "And he went away grieved: for he had great possessions." The figure is a three-quarter length, the turbaned head, bowed on the breast, is almost hidden from the spectator; but the brilliant sleeve on the rich mantle, the ringed fingers, doubtful whether to open or close, those fingers so much accustomed to counting money, so anxious to count it again, tell us what is the expression of the concealed face.

G. F. Watts has studied Titian too thoroughly, and is too much of a painter, not to be able to draw from the nude female figure the most fascinating and delicate effects, and the warm vibrations of golden and ruddy flesh tints.

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The trilogy of Eve is a bright and cheerful conception. *The Creation of Woman*, which, in order of time, would be the first part, is placed by the painter in the middle. She seems to emerge from floating wreaths of flowers amid the singing of birds, with her bosom and head stretched towards the flood of mystic light; she is the Joy of Life the Movement of Creation, the unconscious aspiration towards the infinite Ideal. In the two moments of the *Temptation* and *Repentance* the vision becomes naturally and inevitably clearer, although to my eyes the pan-dynamic transformation is most eloquent, especially in the flowing lines of the woman's figure as she leans against the tree, under which she seeks to hide herself and into which, in the abandonment of her grief, she seems to melt. But perhaps the most striking example of a nude female figure is seen in a picture which is not to be found in this room, and which was given by the painter to the town of Leicester, while a still better version is the property of Mr. McCulloch. It represents the *Fata Morgana*; and with the presentments of *Eve*, of *Endymion*, of *Orpheus and Eurydice*, of *Paolo and Francesca*, on the one side, with the more impersonal renderings of Love, Death, and Life on the other, it is in plastic charm the central figure of the whole cycle of those works in which the artist, selecting the most diverse elements from the Bible, from mythology, and from poetry, has, as it were, recast and welded them together in his mind in order to celebrate the eternal Song of Love. It is not without interest for us Italians that this picture of the *Fata* was suggested by the *Orlando Innamorato* of Boiardo, [just as the *Paolo and Francesca* was directly inspired by the 5th Canto of Dante, at least through the medium of Carlyle's imaginative comments]. The beautiful woman flees through the wood pursued by the flushed and eager horseman, and in her airy flight her hair floats abroad, and the lines of her flexuous body in its rapid motion produce a wonderful effect of grace and modesty. Even from a comparison of the photographs one can say that the first version, in which we see more of the ardent face of the pursuer, has perhaps much more of Venetian breadth, but for ideal charm it is far surpassed by that in the private collection.

Julia Cartwright, who has illustrated with the greatest sympathy many works of the artist, and has pointed out valuable details which were certainly suggested to her by himself, says that in the painter's conception this *Fata* is the symbol of Opportunity, which, once lost, can never be regained. And here the symbolism is clear for all those of his admirers who have any culture at all, although the direct impression of the picture, instinct as it is with femininity, rather conveys to us the thought that beauty is an aspiration and a desire that can never be perfectly realised.

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Watts as a portrait painter was revealed to me entirely in the National Portrait Gallery; and as a sculptor in the studio at Little Holland House, the artist's winter residence in London; though we have clear signs of power in the portrait of himself in the Uffizi, with its exquisitely delicate harmonies and its mature and thoughtful expression; and in the other portrait of himself, painted in 1864, in which we see him with a formal beard and with a hat posed and shaped like that of an Italian artist, perhaps a contemporary of Andrea del Sarto; and though the bust of *Clytie*, which he chose to adorn his room in the above-mentioned Tate Gallery, shows evidence of plastic talent and of a successful assimilation of classical feeling.

He painted all the most important people of his time—poets, philosophers, novelists, politicians, cardinals, great society ladies, people of the middle class, both handsome and plain. He included also in his ideal gallery, one of the principal ornaments of the Victorian Age, many other European personages, Guizot, Thiers, and (amongst Italians) Rossetti, Panizzi the librarian, the Contessa di Castiglioni, and Garibaldi. So that we may say that he disputes with the Bavarian Lenbach the distinction of being at least the most prolific of European portrait painters. Certainly he had no rivals in England. And his superiority seems to me to assert itself also in the number and variety of the types which he has portrayed. Robert de la Sizeranne, who condenses in his brilliant book on “Contemporary English Painting” a number of facts and the results of direct observation, notes that as Watts did not mechanically reproduce his model in order to materialise the spirit of the myths, so neither did he look too much at the persons he was painting: “Il les lit, il les écoute, il les expérimente en quelque sorte, pour saisir le trait distinctif qui les isole, les spécifie et qui reste seul dans le souvenir lorsqu'on pense à eux; mais il ne s'inquiète pas de ce qui n'est pas en eux signe d'idée.”

I would add that by this method the character of the sitter emerges always with absolute clearness, with the touch of life-like sincerity. These portraits are alike in form; with the exception of a few full-length portraits of women, the rest are almost all half-lengths; but this uniformity is almost entirely external, or, at most, was decided upon by the artist because he wished to present them all to the country. Their truthfulness and their characterisation are aided by their sincerity of colour. We may repeat with Gabriel Mourey, the other French critic who has succeeded in interpreting clearly the Art of England in the nineteenth century: “Le peintre seul triomphe ici, puissamment armé de toutes les ressources de son art, habile à traduire et à mettre en lumière les caractéristiques d'une personnalité, avec une belle ampleur de touche, dans une matière souple et forte.”

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And, indeed, these two last adjectives are not used at haphazard ; they really express a certain antithesis which emerges in Watts's manner.

Sometimes the lines of the profile, or three-quarter face, stand out hard against the background, which is often prepared with a yellowish tone, as in the portrait of Lady Mount-Temple. But this insistence on the outline has an illuminating effect in the portrait, for example, of Cardinal Manning, which, with its thin face, its bony and veined hands, immediately reminded one of Van Dyck's *Cardinal Giulio Bentivoglio* in the Pitti Gallery. But Van Dyck's fluidity is in strong contrast to the constructive analysis of the English painter, specially accentuated in the curve of the skull ; dignity is the one feature common to them both.

"You have made me look like a crazy labourer," was Carlyle's remark when he saw the portrait which the artist had painted. And there is a touch of wildness in the reddish face, with a tuft of whitish hair a little disordered on the broad forehead, with its intense eyes looking out under the wrinkled brows and the prominent and rather bitter lips, ready, it seems, as Miss Cartwright wrote, to let loose the thunders of his eloquence upon the crimes and follies of his age. And the right hand resting on the stick which we do not see, the left hand lying on the right arm, in a position which was very characteristic of the great Scotsman, tell us of feelings such as she describes, and entirely destroy every impression of infirmity and weariness. After I had seen the different photographs of Carlyle which are preserved in his unpretentious house at Chelsea, and the bronze monument a little distance from it, it seemed to me that in Watts's picture we have the direct impression of all the human fervour which dwelt in that most proud and most troubled spirit. Certainly this impression was missed by Whistler, who draped him finely, and still more finely surrounded him with an atmosphere of twilight mystery. In the same gallery of portraits we have Carlyle again, painted by Millais ; the attitude is perhaps more imposing, but the face is common and the colour scheme monotonous.

Certainly, whether he represents the philosophic pallor of Stuart Mill, or frames in bays Tennyson's long, clean-shaven face, or depicts Lord Leighton in a splendid academic pose, or gives us in his Rossetti the sensuous and ardent temperament combined with the mystic melancholy of a somewhat dreamy attitude, G. F. Watts is a *dignified* portraitist. Before leaving this Gallery I will call attention also to the portrait of Gladstone. It was painted in 1865, and in its technique it resembles a broad and firmly handled water-colour. The powerful modelling of the head is simple and accurate. The commentator of

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Homer is shown in the serenity of the beardless face and in the keen brown eyes. All the force of the feller of oak trees is in the prominent nose and the tightly closed lips of one accustomed to rule.

But the *chef d'œuvre* among Watts's portraits (I only know the Swinburne by photographs) seemed to me to be that of Joachim the musician in the charming and quiet house near Holland Park. Even now I seem to see that broad face standing out of the background of mysterious harmony to draw from the violin a strain in accord with his dream. The fingers stretched over the strings have none of the usual artificial contraction. We feel that the bow is gliding, one might almost say hovering, in a prelude of the dawn, full of profound sentiment. Whistler has given us another celebrated violinist. But the full-length of Pablo Sarasate in a frock-coat is merely theatrical. In a corner of the room I was surprised to see, or rather to discover, a rough sketch of Garibaldi. But from the artist's indistinct recollection I could not gather any facts which threw light on it.

Little Holland House confirmed me in my opinion as to the error of even the most recent modern criticism (see the article by G. Savich in the *Revue* of April 1st, 1903) in misunderstanding or passing over the master's work as a landscape painter, while at the same time it revealed to me his eminence as a sculptor. The *View of Naples* had already struck me immensely when I saw it at Paris in 1900, first because a certain school of criticism had suggested that landscape, having no philosophical value, was a kind of art which Watts had neglected. What a world of burning and palpitating life there was in this little canvas! It seemed to me that the most attractive beauty of that delicious landscape, with Vesuvius standing over it like a menacing Fate, had never been interpreted with greater eloquence or more vivid atmosphere. Here were all the dreams which are dreamed by youth in its thoughtlessness.

But now, as we stand before the *Mountains of Mentone*, with their rugged and awful peaks, how can we repeat that he looked at nature with an indifferent eye? And he has devoted other compositions to Italian landscape, and specially to Carrarra and the snowy Alps, when for the first time, like Ruskin, he saw them and acknowledged their spell.

Nor did he neglect the beauties of his own country; the woods of Freshwater and the Sussex downs alike stirred him, leading him to direct his natural delight in Turner's effects into a more modern and almost impressionist channel.

All this cannot and should not be left out of sight by any one who would contemplate the artist's mind in his gigantic work. It is

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enough to observe that the painter has not photographed his landscapes, but *composed* them. This poetic intention, natural to a temperament full of the classical spirit, is not only a direct following of the great Turner, but also has a point of contact with Boecklin's more modern work, as has been pointed out by others.

* * * *

I have already noticed the bust of *Clytie*. The profile, the bend of the neck bear the most evident marks of another classical style which he loved—that of Greece. The only trace of the modern spirit is to be found in the sunflower cup—seizing a moment of the mythological metamorphosis—which fitly forms part of the pedestal. This work may be admired or not, according to the critic's frame of mind; but it is certainly outdone by the brilliancy of the canvases. This is just the opposite, it seems to me, of what we find in the case of Lord Leighton. When I stood before the *Athlete Struggling with a Python*, still more when I saw the wonderful study for it, the vigour of the action, the perfection of the forms, in spite of their extreme smoothness, made me forget the artist's somewhat flat paintings, including even the pathetic *tondo* of *The Sea giving up its Dead*.

In the middle of the studio was the figure of a Bishop in bronze, laid out as though for burial, with the hands joined on the breast, broadly and firmly modelled, though the folds of the drapery were rather harsh. But the great surprise was, after passing through one of the living rooms adorned with a copy of a Titian, to come out into a small space which had once been a garden, in which were laid the two iron rails which had been used by the artist to enable him to work at his great equestrian group of *Progress* in the open air, and then to put it back under cover. Naturally, since Watts was in the country, the statue seemed to be quivering with impatience, shut up as it was in its house, which was far from large, amidst a litter of tools and studies. I succeeded, not without some trouble, in grasping its general lines, and was thus able to understand the original idea of the artist's design—*Physical Energy*. For the intrepid youth on his fiery charger is an excellent representation of an explorer who has reached a mountain summit, and shades his eyes with his hand that his gaze may reach to the furthest limit of the unknown lands which he will conquer. The impression that I received was that of a vigorous tribute to the youth of thought. And as I saw the rugged modelling, looking as though the clay had been not so much applied to the framework as flung on to it in masses, I felt that the splendid octogenarian's whole spirit had striven to express itself in the work, much as it resembles the equestrian statue of the hunter, Hugh Lupus, in Cheshire. Now the great

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symbolic group, cast in bronze, has been sent to the Matoppos, to be erected on the tomb of Cecil Rhodes, the tribute of the most idealistic of English artists to the most idealistic of English conquerors.

If we desire, then, to sum up the principal artistic elements which go to make up the powerful and distinct figure of Watts, we must recognise, so far as form is concerned, that the influence under which he worked was foreign rather than national.

The only English painter of whom we can think in connection with some of his work is Turner, for whom, moreover, he always expressed the liveliest admiration. But even the Turneresque characteristics, limited as they are to his vision of certain landscapes, sink into insignificance in comparison with the Phidian conceptions which live before us, warmed and strengthened by the intense colouring of Venice. As to the subject matter, a slight distinction might be drawn, but it would be of a somewhat abstract and indistinct nature. Watts's subject matter is essentially English; it is the plastic voice, so to speak, of a whole glorious literary movement, which is one of the distinctive features of the Victorian Age.

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ILLUSTRATIONS.



ULDRA

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BRITOMART

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DAPHNE



THE MEETING OF JACOB AND ESAU

Photo F. Hollyer



THE WATCHMAN

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HYPERION

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BUILDING THE ARK

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LIFE'S ILLUSIONS





HON. MRS. PERCY WYNDHAM

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THE RIDER OF THE RED HORSE

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PSYCHE





PAOLO AND FRANCESCA

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CONSCIENCE, THE DWELLER IN THE INNERMOST





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THE CREATION OF EVE



EVE TEMPTED

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EVE PENITENT

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ARIADNE

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THE HAPPY WARRIOR



FATA MORGANA

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CONDOTTIERRE

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LADY GODIVA

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THE PRODIGAL SON

1



A BACCHANAL

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HOPE

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LOVE STEERING THE BOAT OF HUMANITY

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PROMETHEUS.

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ASPIRATIONS

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EUROPA



GREED AND LABOUR

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LADY GARVAGH

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FATA MORGANA

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SIR GALAHAD

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LADY WITH MIRROR



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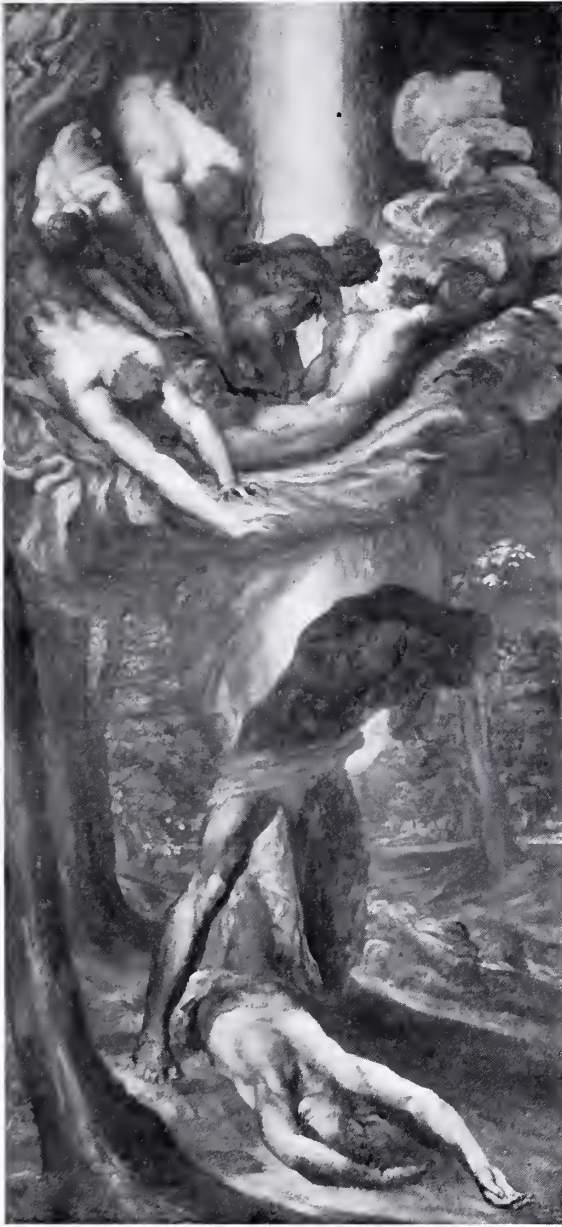
LOVE AND DEATH





NIXIE

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DEATH OF ABEL

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G. F. WATTS, R.A.

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BIRTH OF EVE

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ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE



OPHELIA

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THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTIANITY

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THE GOOD SAMARITAN

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LADY LILFORD

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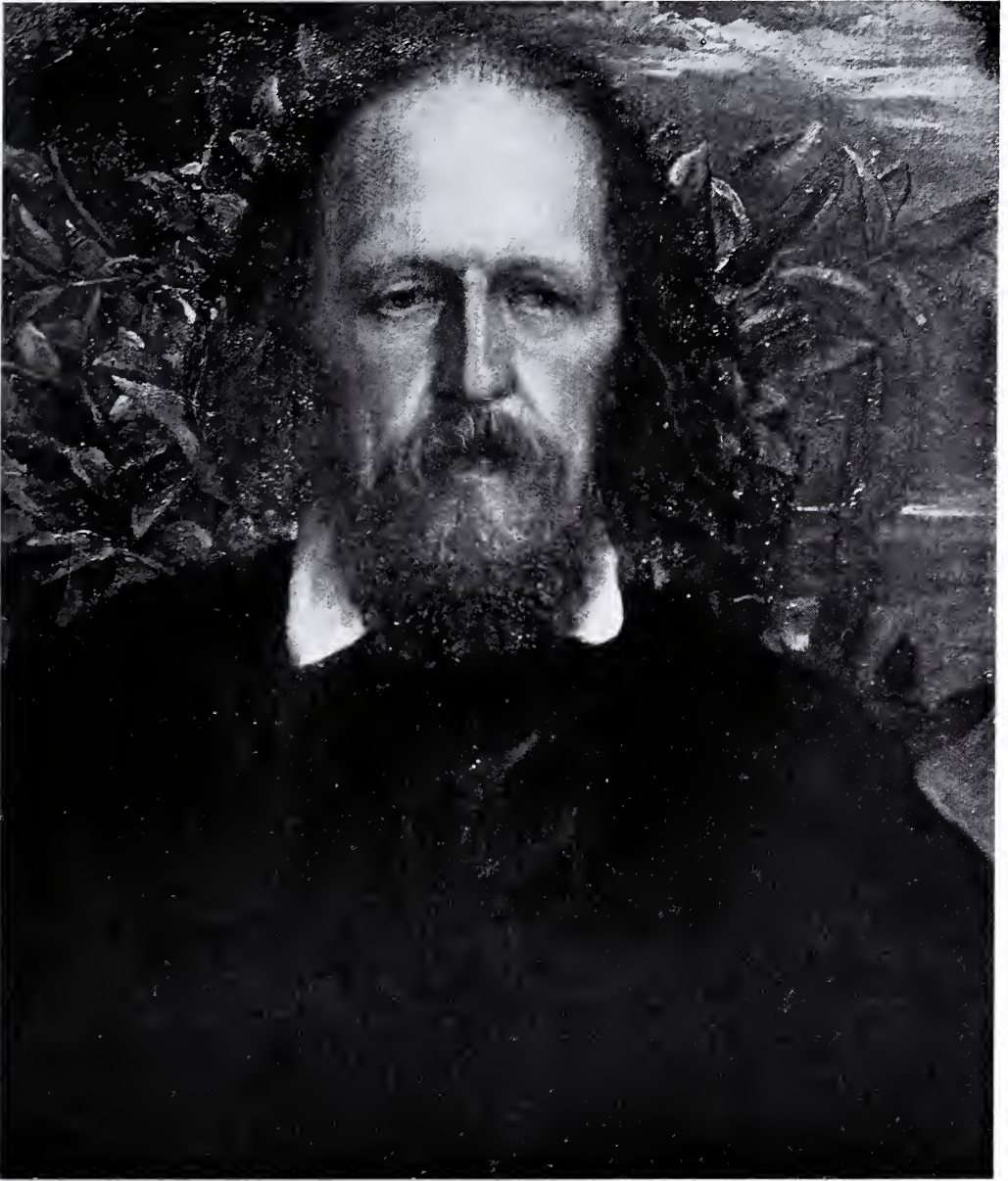
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LOVE TRIUMPHANT



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LOVE AND LIFE



LORD TENNYSON

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CRUEL VENGEANCE

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THE MINOTAUR

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BIRTH OF EVE

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CHARITY

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TIME, DEATH, AND JUDGMENT



THE CHILDHOOD OF JUPITER

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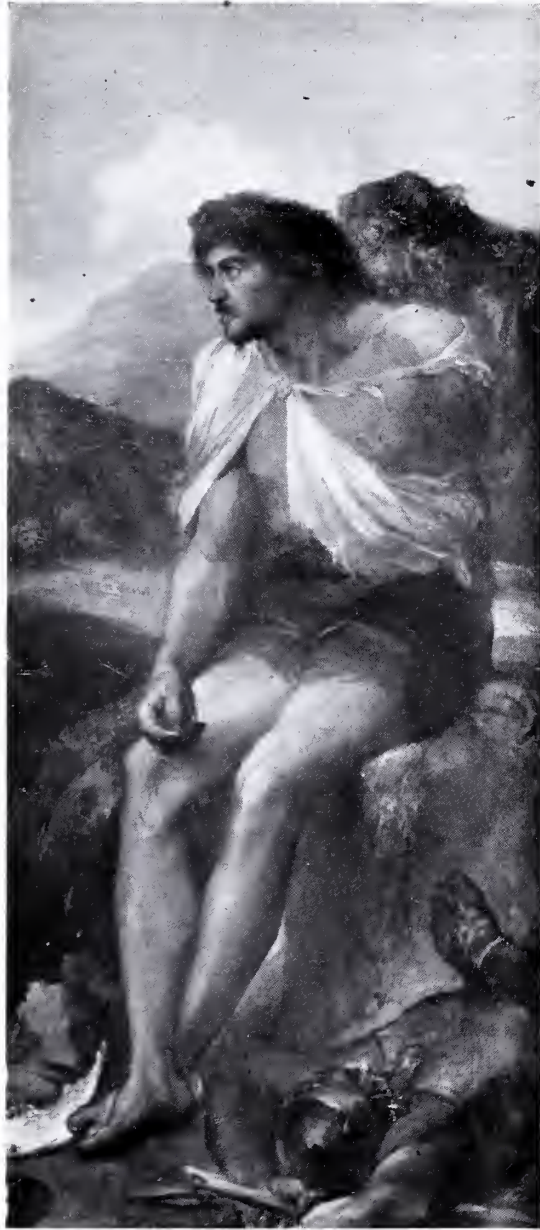
MRS. NASSAU SENIOR

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IDA ON MOUNT OLYMPUS

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SAMSON

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ARIADNE IN NAXOS

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UNA AND THE RED CROSS KNIGHT



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EXPERIENTIA DOCET



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MID-DAY REST



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ENDYMION



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ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE



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WHEN POVERTY COMES IN AT THE DOOR



